

Vendredi: A Surrealist Correspondence. Edited by Xavier Canonne. Ludion, 2020. ISBN 978-949303-924-7. 1,055 pages.

Brussels's Ludion Publishers has made an attractive color facsimile edition of the private Belgian review *Vendredi* available to the public for the first time. This handwritten review was sent in a single copy every Friday for nearly two years to its recipients in Léopoldville, now Kinshasa (in what was then the Belgian Congo), between 1949 and 1951. It was co-edited by Paul Colinet and Marcel Piqueray for Colinet's nephew Robert Willems and his bride Odette when they moved to Léopoldville where Willems had found work as an accountant. A pregnant Odette returned to Brussels in June 1951 for the birth of their first child in November, and Robert in October, ending the run of *Vendredi*.

Imperialism is the context for the review, for it was imperialism that made Willems's work in Léopoldville — and thus the separation from friends and family — possible. However, this context is not referred to in any of the issues other than in a few drawings imagining life in the colony, as the purpose of the review, destined for a readership of two, was not critique but enjoyment — notwithstanding the leftist convictions of some of its contributors. As Xavier Canonne notes in his introduction, there are very few references to current events of any sort in *Vendredi*, since it was not conceived as a newsletter even of family affairs, but rather as an opportunity for friends and family to delight their readers with the life of the imagination in tales, poems, drawings, collages, and even the occasional crossword puzzle.

Contributors to the review included family members from both sides, as well as the surrealist circle in Brussels, of which Colinet was a part: most frequently René Magritte, Marcel Mariën, and Louis Scutenaire, as well as Colinet's old friend Armand Permantier, but others as well — and the review is a real labor of love for Robert and Odette. (Odette also became a contributor to the weekly missives to her husband after her return to Belgium.) This was very much a family enterprise, if the notion of family is broadened to include those in Colinet's circle who knew Robert as a boy, then as a collaborator to *Le ciel bleu* and *Les deux sœurs*, two publications in the orbit of surrealism that appeared immediately after the war in 1945 and 1946. *Vendredi* is not in itself a surrealist review, although its contributions are sometimes inflected by the surrealist sensibility peculiar to Brussels; it consists of drawings — many of them by Colinet and Piqueray, as well as by Magritte, Permantier, and Willems's younger sister Marguerite — and of stories, poems, chronicles, and wordplay intended for the amusement of its two recipients. It is a sign of the fidelity of Colinet's love for his nephew that he and Piqueray always got their review — handwritten, hand drawn, and sometimes collaged on airmail paper — to the post every Friday without fail over the 100 issues of *Vendredi*'s existence. While it is difficult to pin down the precise nature of the contributions to the review — which vary from greetings from relatives to erudite drawings and wordplay — the word *insouciance* might do: a carefree

liberty of spirit that takes nothing seriously, other than play itself, as well as love for those in one's community.

This attitude is certainly revealing of the views of the editors, but also of those of the Brussels surrealist group that was slowly unravelling at this time; the single issue of *La feuille chargée*, the last unified expression of the group, was published in 1950 during *Vendredi's* run. At this point in time, it was more a sense of community that united its members — Colinet, Hamoir, Lecomte, Magritte, Mariën, Nougé, and Scutenaire, all of whom contributed to *Vendredi* to varying degrees — than a sense of purpose, though a shared sensibility counts for much.

A substantial portion, though by no means all, of *Vendredi's* contributions — both illustrations and texts — were previously gathered and published in the Belgian review *Phantomas* nos. 31-34, in June 1962, under the title *Humour vert*. Green humor is not simply a more colorful variant of black humor, but is a humor that is both popular and unripe (as in green fruits and vegetables), as well as provincial — *la langue verte*, for instance, is a term for argot or slang, which puts in an occasional appearance in *Vendredi*. Thierry Poucet, in his 1974 *mémoire de licence* for the Université libre de Bruxelles, defines green humor in the following way: "By *green humor* we designate a humorous point of view whose main components are tolerance, graciousness, a taste for everyday life, for the concrete, for spontaneity with, as corollaries, a series of moral, artistic and sentimental compartments. . . . [T]his point of view, marked by both poetry and ideology, is the result of an osmosis between the taste for play as an apprehension of the real, and considered sentimental or intellectual tendencies. We note that most of these tendencies converge in the concept of nature, valued positively."¹

Green humor is thus more positive in its attitude than black humor, and green in more than one sense, since it values nature; it is a consciously-adopted perspective that is at the same time sophisticated and determinedly naïve. Colinet had been a part of the close-knit surrealist community in Brussels since 1934 and was particularly close to Magritte at a time when the latter was drawing away from Nougé and Mariën. Colinet's drawings or texts appeared in all but the last issue of Magritte's postcard review, *La carte d'après nature*, between 1952 and 1956, and his was one of the presiding spirits of the *Phantomas* review; he appeared without fail in the first sixteen issues of the review, even after his early death in 1957. Colinet thus played a significant role in the 1940s and 1950s among those artists and writers in Belgium, sometimes called the irregulars, for whom art was play, yet who did not play the game of art or literature as others did. He was a mentor to the twins Marcel and Gabriel Piqueray in this regard, who were close to Willems in age, and to Willems himself. Colinet's particular brand of green humor informs the whole of *Vendredi*, despite (or even because of) the fact that it was a family review, an envoi sent with care and affection to a couple familiar with all of the contributors; as Canonne says in his introduction, only Colinet and Piqueray would have seen each complete issue before it was sent abroad, since they would have collected the airmail sheets individually from contributors around Brussels.

The fact that Magritte and Mariën's contributions are nearly always on the same page bears this out, for they would most likely have been drawn and written in Magritte's apartment in Jette, then given to Colinet for inclusion in the issue for which they were intended.

Vendredi has been scrupulously edited by Xavier Canonne, scholar and director of the Musée de la Photographie in Charleroi, who has provided notes and biographies of the contributors in French, Dutch, and English, as well as an index and an appendix of supplementary material at the back of the volume. While some of the contributions were previously published in *Phantomas* — with which Piquera was also closely involved as co-editor — as well as in Piquera's *Jam Session*, published by Atelier de l'agneau in 2003, and in Colinet's own *Œuvres*, published in four volumes by Lebeer Hossmann between 1980 and 1989, the intimate and informal quality of the drawings, collages, and handwritten texts here, reproduced in color, have a different effect than the colder printed texts and black-and-white reproductions in the other volumes, even if the cursive script can sometimes be a challenge to read. Here we can see the actual effort made by Colinet, Piquera, Permantier, Mariën, and Scutenaire as they wrote out their texts within the hand- or ruler-drawn columns, which brings us closer to the labor of love this was. Ludion, Canonne, and the King Baudoin Foundation which supported the publication, are to be commended for making this fugitive publication available for all who care to look, and for all who are able to see.

Steven Harris

Notes

¹ Thierry Poucet, "L'humour vert chez les surréalistes belges et au-delà" (Mémoire de licence, Université libre de Bruxelles, 1973-74), p. 42. Translation by the author.